

A Just  
NARRATIVE,  
OR,  
ACCOUNT



Of the Man whose

*Hands and Legs rotted off:*

In the Parish of

KINGS-SWINFORD,

IN

STAFFORD-SHIRE,

Where he died, *June 21. 1677.*

Carefully Collected by

*J. A. ILLINGWORTH, B. D.*

An Eye and Ear-Witness of most of the  
material Passages in it.

L O N D O N:

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• NARRATIVE.

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Of the Man, whose

Hand and leg washed off.

Revised 1994

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

STATIONER

[illegible]

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W. H. B. D.

1900

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To the Reverend  
**S. FORD. D. D.**

Rector of

*Old-Swinford in Worcestershire.*

S I R,

**B**eing importuned by divers (Gentlemen, Ministers, and others of our Neighbourhood) to draw up a full Narrative and Account of that late sad Providence (which hath filled the hearts and monthes of the Country round about us, the same whereof is also spread into remote parts) I was at last prevailed with to endeavour their satisfaction. And the rather because of a general rumour in the Country, that the man had declared several things to me of near concernment to himself, which he concealed from all other Visitants. That I might not therefore suffer such Reports to pass uncertain, nor be wanting in that which was by some urged as my duty; I did (by travelling, at several times, above sixty miles in the parts adjacent) enquire into divers particular circumstances, which I was not before fully clear in: and have now at last set all down in plain words (suitable to such an account) that the meanest concerned to

### The Epistle Dedicatory.

know and make good use of the providence, might at first reading clearly understand it.

Sir, That I address this to you, is, that I may take an opportunity to make my hearty acknowledgements for your learned and useful Discourses in the Pulpit upon this occasion, to the general satisfaction of your Hearers; and I must in my own name, and many of theirs, intreat, you would make the substance of them more publick from the Press, that the Readers may learn not to be too censorious in things of this nature, nor yet to pass by so signal a Providence without that just Observation it deserves, and due reverence toward that God who is known by the Judgments which he executeth, as you have fully shewed us. I hope, Sir, I invite you to nothing, but what your own Judgment accounts worthy your labour; and I am confident it will be no mean addition to your former elaborate services of God and his Church. In which that you may be long continued for his Glory, and the good of his People, shall be the hearty Prayer of (Reverend Sir)

Your most affectionate

(though unworthy Friend)

to honour and serve you,


J. ILLINGWORTH.



*A just Narrative or Account  
of the Man whose Hands and  
Legs Rotted off in the Parish  
of Kings-Swinford in Staf-  
fordshire, where he Died,  
June 21. 1677.*

**R**ichard Duncalf of Coddal Parish, not far from  
Wolverhampton, in the County of Stafford,  
dying many years since (and his Wife al-  
so) left behind them many Children, and  
but slender provision for them.

One of their Sons, John Duncalf, bound himself  
an Apprentice to Thomas Gibbeart of Kings-Swinford  
in the same County, Wheelwright. When he had  
served his Master two years and seven months (or  
thereabouts) he and his fellow Apprentice stealing  
from their Master a considerable quantity of Iron, de-  
livered it to a third person, who promised to conceal  
it from their Master: but being all brought before the  
Right Honorable the Lord Ward of Dudley-Castle, up-  
on examination severally, they accused each other,  
and confessed the whole: By which means there was  
found concealed (as *Tho. Gibbons* saith) 26 pound  
of old Iron, besides more that was wrought up, new  
Waggon-Nails, ends of Bars, &c. Upon their Con-  
fession the Lord Ward sent them to the House of  
Correction, about October 14. 1675. But the other  
Apprentice being dangerously sick there, and this


*John Duncalf* pretending, at least, to be sick also, they two were set at liberty the week following. After which time this said *John Duncalf* refused to come again to his former service (saying he would never set his feet in *Kings-Swinford* whilst he lived) but offering and engaging to pay to his Master forty shillings, his Master and he gave Releases to each other: by which means this young man (who was then full twenty years of age, and at more liberty than formerly whilst an Apprentice) gave himself up to licentious courses, viz. (as he confessed to me, April 26. 1677) to Idleness; Swearing, Lying, Cursing, Swearing, Drunkenness, and Uncleaness with Women. Which last, he said, was not by committing actual Fornication or Adultery, but in the thoughts of his heart, and by lascivious words, and gestures whereby he had endeavoured to tempt them to lewdness in divers places. I must therefore here clear my self and him from an unjust rumour and report common (as I am informed) in the Country hereabouts, which many people yet believe, viz. [That he confessed some things to me which he desired might be concealed whilst he lived, as, that he had committed a Rape upon a young person, and afterward murdered her: That he was guilty of Buggery, or lying with Beasts, &c.] I do therefore openly declare to all, that these were groundless rumors or reports, and I do assure them he never desired me to conceal any thing he said or confessed to me, nor did he ever speak to me of any such things as these which some have reported and others believed. But the faults above-mentioned seemed to lie as an heavy burden upon his Conscience, when he judged Gods hand was severely chastizing him for them, and all his other impieties; among which his constant profaneness had not been the least, in that, although he could both read and write, yet he had (as he said to me)

a long time neglected all manner of Service and Worship of God, as well on the Lords day as other days, and that both in private and publick. It is said, he stole many things to supply his growing necessities (which his idleness and intemperance brought upon him) chiefly Bibles; and the rather because they would soonest be bought by others. About January the 6th. 1675 coming to the house of *Humphrey Babb*, living at the *Grange-mill*, about three miles from *Wolverhampton*, he begged of *Margaret*, the said *Humphrey's* Wife, Victuals and small drink. The Woman having formerly known him, and compassionating his present condition, gave him freely such as she had, but whilst he stooped to draw drink for him, he stole her Bible, (as he confessed to her afterwards.) This Bible he sold for three shillings to a Maid of *John Downings*, who lives near the *Heath-Forge*, not far from the place where he stole it. By which means, not long after, *Humphrey Babb's* Wife heard of her Bible, demanded it of the Maid that bought it, and making her some allowance toward what she paid for it, received it again. long before either of them saw him, or heard what was become of him: But this being noised in the Country thereabouts, one *Henry Evans* told his Father *Thomas Evans* (commonly called *Painter*) who lives near *Henly* or *Himley* (they both knew him) what *John Duncalf* had done: at which the said *John Duncalf*, when he heard of it, was very angry, and gave out threatening words against the young man; but being charged with it by them, he did not only deny it with some fierceness, but execrated and cursed himself, wishing his hands might rot off, if that were true (as the said *Thomas Evans* testifies) and *John Bennet* his Keeper, saith, he often heard him say to Gentlemen that visited him in his sickness, that he did so curse himself upon that oc-

caston to Thomas Evans. And this he acknowledged of his own accord, to me and many others, several times, when he seemed most serious and in earnest. [That he so cursed himself, and that immediately upon the utterance or cursing of himself, he had an inward horror or trembling upon him; a dread and fear of the Divine Majesty, and Justice of God; which fear and working of his Conscience continued more or less many days after.]

When I asked him (upon this ingenuous acknowledgement) why he did not confess his wickedness, and endeavour that the Bible might be restored to the owner? his answer was, [That the Devil and his men here would not suffer him,] Yet this he acknowledged to me [That within a few days after that accusation his flesh began to look black on the wrists of his hands; and so continued divers weeks before it did sensibly recover.] He went then and wrought with one Thomas Othens a Joyner in Dudley; and (as Othens saith) continued with him about a fortnight (Shrove-tuesday being the last day as he well remembers) and that it was the last work that ever he did; which I cannot wonder at, considering what this poor man said to me concerning himself in reference to that time, viz. [After I had cursed my self about the Bible, I wrought with a Joyner in Dudley; but at that time I had a great and troubling report out, which frequently troubled me, and made me have no great mind to work; and so feeling my self weak and faint, and fearing an issue or Fever, I went towards my acquaintance, but in the way finding I was unable to go any further, I laid my self down in a Barn (at Parson-Hall as I remember) belonging to Sir Walter Wrottesley; and there continued two days and nights before I was found.] (Some say he laid out other times) from Tuesday night to Friday morning.) Being found, he was kept at the charge of the Parish of Autehall (in which Parson-Hall stands) until the



the next monthly meeting of the *Justices* of the Peace, who (*March 27. 1677.*) by examination finding *King-Smith* to have been the last place of his settlement, made an order he should be carried thither, and maintained by that Parish. There he was received, *March 28.* and *John Bennet* appointed to take care of him: first in a Barn belonging to the *three Courts*, (an Inn standing on the Road between *Wolverhampton* and *Kidderminster*.) and after one fortnight removed by the Overseers for the Poor, to the dwelling house of the said *John Bennet* his Keeper in *Wall-Hearth-side*. His flesh at first began to rise in great lumps or knots at the wrists of his hands, and at his knees (as his Keeper tells me) and after a little time to break and run, and shortly after to shrink from the bones at those places, at which time, white putrid matter came out and ran abundantly, causing exquisite pain and torment to this poor man: And so offensive was the smell for several weeks together, that those who came to visit him who were not only many hundreds, but, 'tis believed, thousands (his Keeper and Neighbours say many thousands) were not able to abide in the room with him, nor stand near without the door, except they had herbs or other things at their mouths and noses to smell to. The Visitants being so numerous at all times of the day, especially on the Lords-days, it seemed to give him great disturbance, and made him very unwilling to talk many times, or answer them any thing. They moved him once so far to impatience, when they crowded about him each with a question, having Herbs, and other things at their Noses, that his passion made him to forget his own condition, and with *their Noses* might set off (as divers there present assured me:) for which I gently, but seriously, reproved him at my next visit. He seemed to take the reproof well, ac-  
know-

knowledging the fault of his passionate expressions towards them (provoked as he said, by their crowding, impertinent curiosity, and foolish questions; or to that effect :) But he had forgot, or would not confess, that he used those words, *—about their No-  
[sic] serving off.*

But his Keeper tells me, he would often be very impatient towards the multitude, and call to him, saying, *John, why dost thou not dash out their teeth? dost thou not see how they grin at me?* and the like.

About the twentieth of April many little Worms came out of the rotten flesh, such as are usually seen in dead Corpses (as his Keeper told me) but after he was well washed and cleansed, those ceased, and the room and smell was nothing so offensive as formerly: yet all that while (though it was rumor'd in the Country) he would never confess his execration, and wishes against himself, until his Keeper denied to ease him of the Vermin, Lice, &c. that filled his shirt and doublet, and continually tormented him. He then first promised, that if his Keeper would cut them off and cleanse him, (he had long before cut off all the hair of his head) he would acknowledg the whole truth, which he then did in manner as is before related.

And now he began to beg instruction, and help to repent, and that some Ministers and others, who came to visit him, would pray for and with him, which many did, both publick Preachers and others, at several times; and some who lived near him (as I did) often. Being asked by me what he desired might be begged of God for him, he returned answer to this purpose: *That God would give him repentance, and pardon his five above-mentioned, viz. Idleness, Stealing, Lying, Cursing, Swearing, Drunkenness, unclean Thoughts, and constant Profaneness, &c.*

that he would save him for Christs sake, and give him patience in the mean time. I did accordingly endeavour to represent his case before God, and with humble earnestness to pray for mercy for him; and he seemed at that time to be somewhat affected with the Prayer, &c.

It was about this time, if I mistake not, that he sent for *Humphrey Bubb's* Wife, from whom he stole the Bible, she came and brought the Maid he told it to, along with her: to them he confessed the wrong he had done, and desired they would forgive him; which the Wife told me she did heartily, and prayed God to forgive him as she did. The Maid seemed to be of the same mind and Christian temper.

Very many (as I hinted before) hearing of him, came from all parts adjacent, and some from places far distant, to see this sad spectacle of Divine Justice: and amongst the rest, some of the *Romanists*, one of which, he and his Keeper supposed to be a Priest of that profession, who was earnest with him to renounce his Religion, and become a *Catholic* (as he called it) and they would remove him, take care to heal his Sores, and (said the man, whom they supposed to be the Priest) *I will pawn my soul for thine, that thou shalt be saved*: which I am informed, is an ordinary form of speech amongst the *Papists* of this Country, when they would persuade men to their party. When I enquired of this poor man (to try him) *why he did not accept of their offers?* he answered to this purpose, [*To what end? How can he pawn his soul for mine? none can save me but Christ.*]

Others who had occasion to travel this way from London, and other parts far off, West and North, visited him, we hope not to satisfy their curiosity so much, as to behold a monument of Divine severity, and that they might bear witness, that *although sentence against an evil work is not always executed speedily,*

yet, *God leaves not himself without witness*, in this, as well as former ages, against Atheism and grand impiety.

Upon the eighth of *May* following, both his legs were fallen off at the knees, which the poor man perceived not until his Keeper told him and shewed them to him, holding them up in his hands, and his right hand, hanging only by some ligament, by a little touch of a knife, was taken off also: The other hand at the same time being black as a shoe, and not much unlike, in the fancy of some, for roughness and hardness, to the outside of a dried Neats-tongue. This hand hanged on a long time afterwards by some such thing as the former, and might ('tis possible) have continued in that manner until his death, if he had not desired his Keeper to take that away also as the former, because it was troublesome to him. Now although putrid matter frequently issued out at those places, yet he had not so much pain as he had formerly for a *month* or *six weeks*, as he freely confessed; and acknowledged that his stomach was good, and did digest such meats as he took, and that he had evacuations by *stool* and *urine*, as heretofore in his health.

So that, continuing in this condition some weeks, many began to think the Issues might be stopped, and his life preserved many years, if regularly ordered. Some of the Parishioners were moved in it, that Physicians and Surgeons might be consulted, and good advice taken in the case; but I cannot learn that any thing was done about it, being judged, by some, incurable. It is said that he expressed himself to some that visited him in this manner. [*That now the curse wherewith he had cursed himself being fully come to pass (in that his hands were rotted off) he was persuaded it would go no further.*] But he forgot that God punished him, not for that sin only, but,



but, for all his great transgressions (though for that chiefly) as he formerly confessed to me, he believed. At last his flesh began to waste, and his spirits to fail: so that visiting him again, and observing some change in his flesh and countenance more than formerly, I laboured to convince him more fully of his condition, and to persuade him to look up to the great Physician, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, &c. He seemed to give diligent attention, and earnestly desired me to pray with him; after prayers, when I was about to leave him for that time, he desired I would not forget him in my prayers; making it also his earnest request, that I would come again when ever he should send for me, which I promised I would at any hour day or night. This was June 16. and on the 19. (as his Keeper acknowledgeth) he was in great anguish and trouble of mind; crying out: [*What shall I do to save my poor soul?*] with many other expressions to the same purpose: being very sick, and fearing his approaching death. But upon what account his Keeper would not send for me (in whose hearing he so earnestly desired me to come to him) he knows best, and must answer it, if it was his fault for private respects, as is conjectured. On June 21, in the morning, I went again to visit him, unsent for, but found him insensible, and past any further advice, I said by him until almost noon. He lay still, with his eyes fixed, as a dying man, moved not at any thing we said to him, but upon pouring into him a little drink with a spoon at several times, he coughed a little, and growled, and then lay as before. When I saw there was no probability he would understand any thing I said, I left him (after prayer made for him with the company there present, in the house) and had notice brought me, that he died about two hours after my departure from him.

But

Before I sum up the whole of this Narrative, and account of his condition, I judge it may be acceptable to the Reader to insert some short Observations, communicated to me by an ingenious Gentleman, our Neighbour, who several times visited him in his affliction. Take them therefore in his own words.

"When I first saw this young man (which was quickly after he was brought into *Kings-Swinford*) he appeared to me to be of a vigorous state of body, and of an healthy constitution, saving the strange defect under which he laboured; his hands and legs being then deprived of sense and motion. I observed them; and handled him. They were from both wrists and knees blackish and dying; and I took notice, that about each wrist and knee there was as it were a *Circle* at the joynt that divided the sound from the dying parts, and seemed like a ligature prohibiting any nourishment to pass those bounds; so that the blood and spirits being wonderfully stopped in their circulation, it must necessarily follow, that the parts thus deprived of their wonted supply, must wither and die as a leaf in Autumn: which sad progress they made till both hands and legs from the wrists and knees became dead and dried, black and hard, like Mummy, before they fell off at the joyns, which they afterward did. I also observed, that at the first, above each of the forementioned circles, there brake out a sore, at which the nourishing juyce (designed by nature to have fed those parts) emptied it self (now in those sores corrupted) in a *quinture of sanies*, so horribly stinking, that few of his Visitants could well endure the room without some strong smelling defensive. But visiting him after those dead limbs were fallen from the body (all but one hand which was almost severed) I saw the joyns with the flesh look well and healthy.

"thy. They seemed to me free and untouch'd by  
 "the former mortification, being quick and sensi-  
 "ble, that now the fellow complained upon the  
 "least touch thereof, yet seeming to promise an ea-  
 "sie cure, for that ichorous stinking humor was  
 "gone; the flesh was raw, but sweet, and here and  
 "there besmeared with a thick corrupt pus, an en-  
 "couraging sign (say Artists) that sores incline to  
 "healing: But this poor creature wanting all help  
 "from Art or Medicine, save what the application  
 "of the leaves of Mullein afforded, which by his  
 "Keeper were used to defend the raw parts; in some  
 "weeks there issued the like thin and stinking hu-  
 "mor as before, which soon put a period to his life.  
*So far my Friend.*

As to the young man himself, he was (as he told  
 me a few days before he died) about *twenty two*  
 years of age. It was easie to observe, he had been  
 a strong young man, naturally of a stubborn tem-  
 per, much hardened by evil courses; yet he seemed  
 sometimes to be affected with his condition, the dis-  
 courses made to him, and prayers with him; and I  
 wish I might have had from him as clear an evidence  
 of a comfortable change wrought in him, as I would  
 gladly have told the world. I must in charity leave  
 his final condition to God, who thus afflicted and  
 chastized him for the space of near about *four months*,  
 that he might be a signal spectacle to thousands, of  
 Gods displeasure against impiety.

The sum of all is this, That a strong, lusty, young  
 man, as most in the County where he was born,  
 being unfaithful to God and his Master, and giving  
 himself to licentiousness and wickedness, was  
 brought to a morsel of bread; and by doing evil  
 and denying it with execrations, had a sting and se-  
 cret remorse in his conscience, by which, and want  
 (the fruit of his idleness and intemperance) he  
 grew





SIR,

Being requested by Mr. Illingworth to give you an account of what I am able to say concerning John Duncalf, I apprehend the best way is by a bare and brief Narrative of that discourse that passed between us whilst I was with him; if there is any thing worth your cognizance, you may make use of it as you please.

Our Discourse was as followeth.

May 1st. 1677.

Quest. **S**peaking to him of the deplorable-ness of his Condition, and that sure there was a more than ordinary hand of Gods Providence in it arising from some evil act or actions of his.

B

Answ.

*Answ.* Answered yes, 'twas for his sins.

*Quest.* When I told him that sin was generally the procuring Cause of every mans sufferings; but under such remarkable and dreadful sufferings as these were, there is usually one or more special sins to be inquired after, as the nearest procuring Cause or Causes.

*Answ.* He answered yes; so it was in his case. He stole a Bible from a Woman, and being charged with it, denied it with this fearful wish, [That his Hands might rot off if he stole it.]

*Quest.* Then I asked him, whether his hands began to blacken, or change Colour, or tingle, &c. presently after the imprecation, or that fearful wish of his?

*Answ.* Answer'd no; but his Conscience tingled sadly.

*Quest.* John, how long was it e're your hands began to rot, or had any sign of putrefaction upon them after the Curse?

*Answ.* About a fortnight.

*Quest.*

24  
**Quest.** Have you made your peace  
with God for so great an offence?

**Answ.** [ Being a man not apt to  
speak, and ignorant withal ] made  
little answer, only shook his head.

**Quest.** Have you asked the Woman  
forgiveness, and to your power endeavour-  
ed to make satisfaction; or if the Bible  
were in your hands, to make Restitution?

**Answ.** Yes, he did send for her,  
and she came accordingly, and pray-  
ed God forgive him, for she did.

**Quest.** John, canst pray? I have not  
found in thee any motions or inclinations  
thereunto since I came.

Shakes his head again, and nothing  
he said.

**Quest.** John, dost thou know how at  
so great a distance as sin hath made thee,  
to go to the Father?

**Answ.** Yes, by Jesus Christ, whi-  
spering it softly, yet so as I might hear  
him.

**Quest.** Then fearing he did not under-  
stand what Christ hath done for the World,  
I very briefly opened to him the Tenor and

Conditions of the Covenant of Grace, and  
so how he must expect Mercy at the hands  
of God.

*Answ.* Then (so far as I could guess)  
he began somewhat to relent, for the  
Tears trickled down his cheeks, and  
many Symptoms of conviction and  
sorrow seemed to be upon him; say-  
ing these words, or to this purpose:  
For Gods sake, Sir, pray for me.

*Quest.* John, I am glad to see some,  
though the least tokens of penitence in  
thee ----- The Lord enlarge thine heart,  
and make thy Conscience tender ----- I am  
willing, John, to pray for thee, and so I  
perceive is this whole company; But it  
would be great satisfaction to us, if you  
would acquaint us, what we should more  
particularly desire of God on your account.

*Answ.* Good Sir, that my sins may  
be pardoned, as loss of Time, neg-  
lect of Duty, and the service of God.

*Quest.* Is not Sabbath-breaking one?

*Answ.* O yes, yes!

*Quest.* Have you any thing else to say?

*Answ.* No. Then let us pray. ---

Ending



Ending with the Lords Prayer, he <sup>25</sup> repeated the Petitions after me, saying *Amen*, with somewhat an elevated voice; being observed to weep several times whilst we continued prayer.

After which I parted with him, making me to promise him the continuation of my Prayers.

About a fortnight after he sends a Messenger to me to tell me he desired my company again; at which time I made it my business not so much to ask him Questions, as to inform him of those Truths that as I thought had a necessary conducency to our eternal peace. [ Spending some hours with him that day, as I could bear the noysome stench that then came from him. ] Before I came away that time, which was the last time that I saw him; his Keeper told me, that a Popish Priest had been with him some few days before, earnestly endeavouring to proselyte him to their Religion; using this Argument: That if he would turn *Roman Catholick*, I will pawn

pawn my Soul to thy Soul thou shalt  
be saved. But all he could obtain of  
the poor man, was only this, that he  
would consider of it. Then asking  
*John Duncalf*, whether this was true?  
He answered, Yes. Praying with  
him, I took my final leave and fare-  
well. This is all (worthy Sir) that  
I know concerning him. I can only  
add that I am

Your most humble Servant,

*Kinsare, Aug.*

17. 1677.

**JONATH. NEWBY.**

**We**

WE whose Names are here-  
unto subscribed, living in  
the Neighbourhood of  
*Kings-Swinford*, where *John Duncalf*  
the subject of the preceding Narrative,  
whilst Gods hand was so severely up-  
on him, for the most part resided; and  
having most of us visited him and  
discourfed him in that condition, and  
the rest of us received frequent Infor-  
mations of the Passages herein men-  
tioned from a multitude of credible  
Witnesses; do (in order to the ren-  
dring so useful a Relation more credi-  
table so far as we are known) attest,  
that we judge it to be very exactly  
and impartially penned in all the par-  
ticulars: and especially, in those  
Passages of it which contain the fre-  
quent serious acknowledgements of the  
mentioned *John Duncalf*, (*That he did*  
*imprecate that Judgment upon himself*  
*which is here expressed, and upon the*  
*occasion here related*) which he made  
not

not only in the hearing of the Author,  
but also of most of us: as also, in  
the substance of those that relate the  
rotting off of his Hands and Legs before  
his death, in the manner herein men-  
tioned. \* And this attestation we make  
with no other design, but that God  
may have the glory, and the world  
the benefit of so Exemplary a Provi-  
dence. For which end we as heartily  
accompany this Narrative with our  
prayers, as with our hands.

Simon Ford, D. D.

Tho. Wilsby.

Amb. Sperry.

John Reynolds.

Samuel Mountfort.

Edward Page.

mentioned John Duncanson (That he did  
impart the Judgment upon himself  
which is here expressed, and upon the  
occasion here related) which he made